

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please amend the substitute specification at page 5, lines 7-22, as follows:

In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention a customer's free postage value or other VBIs are made to expire after a specified time period, such as for example, thirty days after the customer signs up for the service. Controlling the time frame over which promotional items such as free postage value may be redeemed may reduce the overall cost of a promotional campaign. Also, the utilization of promotional items that expire after a predetermined time allows on-line providers of PC postage or other VBI to offer promotional items with an increased value (e.g., from \$20 to \$50) to new customers because the provider can reduce the cost of giving away the promotional item. ~~As used herein "free postage" and "free postage value" are sometimes used interchangeably, it being understood that "free postage" refers to free postage value a consumer will be given by a provider.~~